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## Personal care assistants: the next employees to unionize?

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Recent developments at the state capitol suggest that up to 20,000 individuals who are not currently eligible to join a union may soon be able to do so. These individuals are Personal Care Assistants hired directly by an elderly or disabled person or the person's family to assist with bathing, grooming, dressing, and other personal needs. They are paid through the state's Medicaid program administered by the Minnesota Department of Health and Human Services.

SEIU Healthcare Minnesota, one of the biggest unions in the state, is pushing for a change in the law that would allow these Personal Care Assistants to be represented by a union. Governor Dayton and incoming House Speaker Paul Thissen have said they are open to the proposal. If it succeeds, SEIU will seek to organize and bargain on behalf of Personal Care Assistants as to wages, benefits, and other terms and conditions of work.

Many organizations employ Personal Care Assistants directly. Some of these employees are currently represented by a union while others are not. *Employers should be attentive to SEIU's efforts to amend state law because there may also be increased efforts to organize employed Personal Care Assistants.* With Michigan's recent enactment of right-to-work legislation and similar efforts in neighboring states, Minnesota is increasingly attractive to unions seeking to expand their membership.

There are a number of proactive steps that can—and should—be taken before an employer receives notice that a union is seeking to represent its employee.

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